

## **Authentic Language Materials: A New Outlook**

**Adel Dastgoshadeh**

*English Language Department, Sanandaj Branch  
Islamic Azad University, Sanandaj, Iran*

**Kaveh Jalilzadeh**

*English Language Department, Science and Research Branch  
Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran*

### **Abstract**

Texts are said to be authentic if they are genuine instances of language use as opposed to exemplars devised specifically for language teaching purposes. The question of authenticity appeared as an important issue within communicative language teaching and in relation to notional/functional syllabuses, where emphasis was placed on ensuring that the classroom contained natural language behavior, content was relevant to the learner through the process of needs analysis. Therefore, like the other hotly debated issues in language teaching, it has been dealt with from different perspectives. The authors of the present paper believe that authenticity is not an independent feature of language and language use but an outcome of the process of fulfilling the needs of the learners for which they have strived to learn and use the language. Furthermore, we can say that authenticity is not a criterion against which language materials and language use are evaluated but it is considered as an outcome of the complicated process of selecting language materials and language use.

### **Overview**

There are various other reasons why authenticity may be regarded as important. One is that it presents learners with language exposure similar to that enjoyed by native speakers, including all the characteristics of natural language which may be necessary for the learner properly to interpret texts. In addition, there is motivational attraction for insisting on authentic texts, created as a means of communicating content and not for some pedagogic purposes.

Breen (1985) extends the common notion of authenticity and identifies four types:

- 1) Authenticity of the texts which we may use as input data for our students;
- 2) Authenticity of the learners own interpretations of such texts;
- 3) Authenticity of tasks conducive to language learning;
- 4) Authenticity of the actual social situation of the classroom language.

By identifying a category of task authenticity, Breen is able to recognize that a classroom activity may be valid, natural and 'authentic' to the language learning process, while the instances of language use that it entails may be inauthentic in the established sense of the word. Widdowson (1990) argues that to generalize the meaning of authenticity in this way is to rob the term of true significance.

Widdowson (1996, cited in Rajagopalan 1999, p.201) states that authenticity is dependent upon the authority of the native speaker.). Richards (2001) believes that teaching materials are a key component in most language programs. He explains that whether the teacher uses a textbook which has been prepared institutionally or he uses his or her own materials, instructional materials serve as the

basis for much of the language input learners receive and the language practice that occurs in the classroom. According to Richards (2001), authentic materials refers to the use in teaching of texts, photographs, video selections, and other teaching resources that were not specifically prepared for pedagogical purposes. He distinguishes authentic materials from created materials and explains that created materials refers to textbooks and other specially developed instructional resources. He argues that authentic materials may have positive effect on learner motivation because they are intrinsically more interesting and motivating than created materials.

Kramsch, C &, Sullivan, P. (1996) changed the word authenticity to appropriacy- appropriate pedagogy. Widdowson (1990) views authenticity as a relation between the learner and a text, and he speaks of the necessity for learners to be able to 'authenticate' texts as pieces of communication. He distinguishes between authenticity (a process, characterized as above), and *genuine*, used to refer to attested instances of language use (a product). Genuineness is a characteristic of the passage itself and is an absolute quality. Authenticity is a characteristic of the relationship between the passage and the reader and it has to do with appropriate response.

Widdowson (1980) also points out that 'the pedagogic presentation of language necessarily involves methodological contrivance which isolates essential features from their natural surroundings.' This captures the common argument against the necessity for authenticity, and opens the way for the simplification, and other doctoring of texts for reasons of pedagogic presentation – clarifying and giving salience to selected language points, for example.

According to Feng and Byram (2002), proponents of using authentic materials believe that the stamp of using authentic text in foreign language education ensures a direct relationship to educational objectives. They contend that the enthusiasm for using authentic materials in foreign language textbooks has become intensified with increasing popularity of the communicative orientation to language teaching in the last few decades because students need to refer to contextually appropriate ways native speakers actually put the target language in use (Wilkins 1976). Byram and Esartesarries (1991 cited in Feng and Byram 2002) point out that the content of textbook needs to be realistic and the cultural should be presented in a textbook as it is lived and talked about by people who are credible and recognizable as real human beings. They propose four dimensions of textbooks analysis:

- Analysis at the micro-social level of the social identity of individuals of individuals, of their social environment, of their personality.
- Analysis at the macro-social level of socio economic, geographic and historical representations
- Analysis of the viewpoint taken by the author, either explicitly or implicitly
- Analysis at the inter-cultural level of mutual representations and recognition by the nature and cultures.

In developing materials, to Tomlinson (2003), authentic texts can provide exposure to language as it is typically used. Tomlinson (2001) argue that most researchers (e.g. Ruddy 2003) emphasize on the effect of the authenticity on learners. Tomlinson (2001) refers to Day and Bamford (1998 cited in Tomlinson 2001) who attack the cult of authenticity and advocate simplified reading texts which have the natural properties of authenticity and Ellis (1999 cited in Tomlinson 2001) who argues for enriched input which provides learners with input which has been flooded with exemplars of the target structure in the context of meaning focused activities. Tomlinson (1998) argues that materials can provide exposure to authentic input through the advice they give, the instructions for their activities and the spoken and written texts they include. The materials, he continues, can also stimulate exposure to authentic input through the activities they suggest. This means that there is no point in using long extracts from newspapers with beginners but it does not mean that beginners cannot be exposed to authentic input. He emphasizes that ideally materials at all levels should provide frequent exposure to authentic input which is rich and varied. In other words the input should vary in style, mode, medium, and purpose and should be rich in features which are characteristics of authentic discourse in the target language.

Van Lier (1996, cited in Rubdy, 1998, p. 166) believes that authenticity' is related to action that is intrinsically motivated, when a learner has a genuine desire to learn, rather than being compelled by some external force to do so. He also believes in amplification rather than simplification.

Guariento, W. & Morley, J. (2001) commented on :

- An approach with four principles
- When to introduce authentic materials.
- Texts or task authenticity

Hutchinson and Waters (1987), regarding the issue, express that it is necessary to be clear what the term “authentic” really means. It usually carries the sense of “taken from the target situation and, therefore, not originally constructed for language teaching purposes”. In reality, they continue, this is a contradiction of the term authentic. Authenticity is not a characteristic of a text in itself, but it is a feature of a text in a particular context. A text alone has no value. A text is a message from a writer to an assumed reader. They conclude that no intrinsic merit in an “authentic” text. What we have to do is once more to see the text as part of the teaching/ learning process. They emphasize that the question should be: What role do I want the text to play in the learning process? We should be looking not for some abstract concept of authenticity, but rather the practical concept of fitness to the learning purpose. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) contend that it can easily be seen that different types of text will be required at different stages of a course, depending on what we want the text for.

Dastgoshadeh and Jalilzadeh (2010) believe that as there are two different types of tasks; pedagogical and target tasks; and also as it is commonly believed that tasks can be a real manifestation of real life in classrooms, the accomplishment of these two different types of tasks using any form or forms of the language can be a sample of authentic language use. They claim that the authenticity of language and language use refers to the extent to which the language used and the behaviors conducted by the learner are in line with his or her needs.

## Conclusion

Authenticity is not an independent feature of language and language use to be used as a criterion against which language materials and language use are evaluated but an outcome of the process of helping the learners achieve the goals they have set for themselves. As far as the needs of the learner, whether pedagogical or target, which in turn are affected by different factors including the context and the goals are met, authenticity has been taken into account.

## References

- [1] Breen, M. P. (1985). Authenticity in the language classroom. *Applied Linguistics*, 6, (1), 60-70.
- [2] Guariento, W. & Morley, J. (2001). Test and task authenticity in the EFL classroom. *ELT Journal*, 55, 4, 347-353.
- [3] Feng, A., & Byram, M. (2002). Authenticity in college English textbook: An intercultural perspective, *RELC Journal*, 33 (2), 58-86.
- [4] Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for specific purposes: A learning centered approach*. Cambridge: CUP.
- [5] Richards, J. C. (2001). *Curriculum development in language teaching*. Cambridge: CUP.
- [6] Ruddy, R. (2003). Selection of materials. In B. Tomlinson (Ed.), *Developing materials for language teaching*, (pp. 37-57). London: Continuum.
- [7] Tomlinson, B. (1998). Introduction. In B. Tomlinson (Ed.), *Materials development in language teaching*, (pp. 1-25). Cambridge: CUP.
- [8] Tomlinson, B. (2001). Materials development. In R. Carter & D. Nunan (Eds.) *The Cambridge guide to teaching English to speakers of other languages*, (pp. 66-72). Cambridge: CUP.
- [9] Tomlinson, B. (2003). Introduction: Are materials developing? In B. *Developing materials for* Wilkins, D. A. (1976). *Notional syllabus*. Oxford: OUP.

- [10] Kramsch, C. & Sullivan, P. (1996). Appropriate pedagogy. *ELT Journal*, 50, 3, 199-212.
- [11] Rajagopalan, K. (1999). Of EFL teachers, conscience, and cowardice. *ELT Journal*, 53, 3, 200-206.
- [12] Rubdy, R. (1998). Reviews. *ELT Journal*, 52, 2, 166-170.
- [13] Widdowson, H. G. (1979). *Explorations in Applied Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [14] Widdowson, H. G. (1990). *Aspects of Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [15] Widdowson, H. G. (2003). *Defining issues in English language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Copyright of European Journal of Scientific Research is the property of EuroJournals, Inc. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.